



Developmental Disabilities Administration

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Supports Intensity Scale (SIS) Frequently Asked Questions

On May 25, 2010, DDA began a pilot study using the SIS with people receiving DDA funded services in Maryland. The intent of the project was to use an assessment that will accurately measure the support needs of people in Maryland. The assessments that are currently being completed will provide DDA with the data to examine how to improve resource allocation for efficiency, effectiveness and equity across the State. DDA's goals are to:

- Provide each person with sufficient resources to meet their measured support needs, and
- Improve the efficiency, effectiveness and equality of the resource allocation process.

About the Supports Intensity Scale

What is the Supports Intensity Scale?

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD)'s web site (www.aaidd.org) defines the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS) as a tool that "... measures the individual's support needs in personal, work-related, and social activities in order to identify and describe the types and intensity of the supports an individual requires. The SIS was designed to be part of person-centered planning processes that help all individuals identify their unique preferences, skills, and life goals." This tool was developed over a five-year period by AAIDD and published in January 2004.

What does the SIS measure?

The SIS measures support needs in the areas of home living, community living, lifelong learning, employment, health and safety, social activities, and protection and advocacy. The information regarding these support needs in these life activities, behavioral and medical areas is gathered during an interview with the person and those who know the person well.

How does it measure “support needs?”

The SIS assessment ranks each activity according to how often (*frequency*), how much (*amount*), and what kind (*type*) of support the person needs for that particular activity. These rankings create an overall score based on the person’s total support needs. This is a standardized score generated from scores on all of the items assessed by the Scale.

How are exceptional medical and behavioral needs assessed through the SIS?

Other states have developed additional questions to address these areas of support to ensure adequate funding. In Maryland, DDA has been using these previously developed questions. The DDA may develop additional questions, as they are deemed necessary.

It should also be noted the scale may not always correctly reflect needs that are driven by high intensity low frequency events. These types of events can be addressed through documentation and other means.

Do support scores stay the same over time?

The DDA and the AAIDD understand that people’s needs change over time. With those changes come changes in the level of supports that a person needs. The AAIDD web site further explains, supports “must be developed and delivered in age-appropriate settings, with the understanding that, regardless of intellectual abilities or limitations, people should have the opportunity to engage in activities and life experiences just like any other person.”

Is the SIS specifically designed for use with people with intellectual disabilities?

Yes. During development of the SIS, AAIDD determined the average support scores through assessing the support needs of a diverse population of people with intellectual disabilities.

How is SIS different from adaptive behavior scales?

The SIS is not an adaptive behavior instrument and should not be used as one. An adaptive behavior scale measures skills whereas SIS measures support needs in 85 life activities, behavior, and medical need areas. As noted by AAIDD, “Traditionally, a person's level of developmental disability has been measured by the skills the individual lacks. SIS shifts the focus from lacks to *needs*. The Scale evaluates practical supports people with developmental disabilities need to lead independent lives.”

Are other States using the SIS?

Yes. Since its publication in January 2004, SIS is now used by 14 states across the U.S. and is being piloted for use in another six states. Its use stretches world wide as it is currently administered in 13 languages across 19 nations

Where can I obtain additional information regarding the SIS?

The AAIDD web site, www.aaidd.org, has additional information that you may find helpful.

Is a sample of the SIS available?

A sample of the tool that is used for this assessment is available on the AAIDD web site. <http://www.siswebsite.org/galleries/default-file/DarleneSimmonsAAIDD.pdf>

The SIS in Maryland

Why did Maryland decide to pilot a new assessment tool?

For almost three (3) decades, DDA has been using the Individual Indicator Rating Scale (IIRS) to assess the level of needs of people that DDA funds. Questions have been raised regarding the adequacy of the IIRS to assess people's level of need and related funding levels.

What prompted Maryland to choose the SIS?

The DDA began exploring various tools that were being used by other states to assess the level of needs for people with developmental disabilities. After thorough research and analysis of various assessments, discussions with other States, and discussions with DDA stakeholders, the DDA determined that the SIS was the appropriate tool to pilot.

How did DDA choose the people to be included in the pilot study?

A random sample of people was selected statewide. In order to ensure a valid sample, all of the 25 possible variations of scores on the current needs assessment tool (Individual Indicator Rating Scale- IIRS) plus any add-on services needed to be represented. The study will compare the distribution of sampled people in the SIS assessment levels to the distribution of people in the IIRS matrix on both a statewide and a regional basis to determine if the SIS can help DDA:

- Provide each person with sufficient resources to meet their measured support needs, and
- Improve the efficiency, effectiveness and equality of the resource allocation process

Who should attend a SIS interview session?

The person should be the primary source of information about himself or herself.

Two (2) valid respondents are needed for each interview. A qualified respondent should:

- Know the person well (at least 3 months)
- Know the person in a variety of settings, i.e. home, work, community, etc.
- Be able to understand and respond to all the questions regarding support needs, frequency and time spans.

The person to be assessed can be considered a valid respondent if s/he is able to understand and respond to all the questions. In this case, only one other valid respondent is needed.

What accommodations should be made for the person being assessed?

If the person to be assessed has difficulty with people s/he does not know, is challenged with certain settings or times, scheduling the interview will include accommodations to reduce the likelihood that termination of the interview will be necessary.

For example:

- Selecting respondents who not only know the person but people who have a good relationship with the person;
- Selecting a location and/or time for the interview that works best for the person.

A backup person may accompany the person back to their living or working area if s/he chooses to leave, thereby, allowing the other respondents to continue to participate until completion of the assessment.

How much time does it take to administer the SIS?

It takes approximately one to one and half hours to administer the SIS. Time taken depends on a number of factors, including the person's attention span, time scheduled, and the number of people in the group,

Is the SIS only for adults?

The current version of the SIS was developed for adults. The AAIDD has just finished testing a version designed to measure support needs for children that will soon be available for use.

What if I or a person I support does not wish to participate in a SIS interview?

During this initial baseline phase of SIS assessments, a person may choose not to participate in the interview process. Once adopted as the standard for determining support needs and subsequent funding levels, a person's support needs will need to be assessed in order to receive funding. While information directly from the person is preferable, respondents as defined above can provide the information to complete the assessment.

Can anyone administer the SIS?

In order to administer the SIS, a person must be trained and certified by the AAIDD as reliable to conduct the assessment. On-going inter-rater reliability must be maintained.

Who is administering the SIS in Maryland?

Currently, the staff who are contracted to complete the IIRS assessment are the people who have been trained and certified as reliable to administer the tool in Maryland.

Who is compiling the data from the SIS pilot?

The results of the SIS assessment are being entered by DDA staff into the AAIDD SIS on-line database.

How long will it take DDA to complete the necessary samples?

The DDA anticipates that it will have the initial sample interviews completed by June 30, 2012.

How are stakeholders involved in the ongoing implementation of the SIS?

DDA has formed a SIS Stakeholder Advisory Group, which includes self-advocates, advocates, providers, and other stakeholders. The Advisory Group's role is to review and make recommendations to the Department regarding the development and implementation of the SIS.

Whom may I contact if I have additional questions?

Please contact Bette Ann Mobley, DDA's Assistant Director for Programs, at 410-767-5600 or bamobley@dhmh.state.md.us